Housing Choices Focus Groups

Summary of Key Issues, Concerns, and Ideas

The *Seattle Planning Commission* conducted three focus groups in late February 2003 with the goal of getting a wide variety of perspectives and input on housing options for the City.

Key Areas of Agreement

- **There is a need for housing options –** Provide housing options that are affordable to a broad spectrum of people, diverse housing types to meet different needs

- **There is a changing demographic in the housing market –** Recognition of the changing housing market needs such as singles, single parent households, empty nesters, and multigenerational families.

- **Design review is important for ensuring quality and neighborhood context –** Need for review is important whether administrative or public process.

- **Establishing criteria –** Ensure quality and address impacts to neighbors by articulating clearly defined criteria for these housing types

- **Key impacts –** Privacy, parking, traffic, neighborhood context and character are the impacts that should be considered when looking at these housing options.

- **Prioritize housing types when certain characteristic exist -** Make use of alleys for DADU's or areas where the city wants to prioritize more housing growth.

- **Need to provide tools for people to ensure it is done right -** Various suggestions were made for tools and incentives from how to guides to providing monetary incentives.

Key Areas of Disagreement

- **Locating in single family zones –** some are okay with this, others have serious concerns or don't want it allowed in single family zones without constraints

- **Need for these housing options –** some don't think there is a need in their particular neighborhood for these housing types.

- **Affordability –** some believe permitting these housing types should be tied to their affordability; others think that expanding choices and the supply are equally important goals – though affordability is desirable where feasible.

- **Parking and traffic –** disagreement over how much emphasis can be placed on this and whether a higher standard can be placed on these housing types; and whether the small additional impact is a real problem or a perception.

- **Need for neighborhood input –** disagreement over who constitutes the 'neighborhood' when seeking neighborhood input -- neighbors in the periphery, district councils, or whole community. Also varied opinions on the role of neighborhood input.

- **Guidance and standards -** although most agreed that some standards are a must, there was wide variation about what criteria is important (i.e. lot sizes, setback, height restrictions, alleys, dispersion criteria) and how to ensure standards don't add too many restrictions or make them unaffordable to build.

Unique Ideas and Suggestions

- **Plan Book of preapproved designs**
  The City could develop a   series of pre-approved designs to ensure design quality and fit, simplify and help expedite the review process, and control costs.
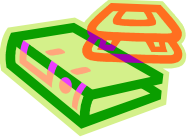
- **Produce a 'how to guide' for DADU's**
  Would explain and give guidance about the process, estimated costs, and nuts and bolts advice for a homeowner who is considering building a Detached Accessory Dwelling Unit (aka. DADU)
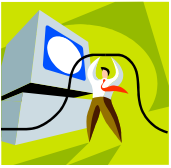
- **Ombudsman**
  To assist individuals who wish to pursue housing options through the City process and possibly to look for funding options.

- **Training/assistance on being a landlord and developer**
  To ensure that the new "mom and pop landlords" that will be created with this housing type know their rights and the rights of their tenants.

- **Funding to help homeowners do DADU's**
  Look for existing opportunities or create new options for providing homeowners with funding to build DADU's. Could possibly link funding availability to affordability

- **Tours of demonstration projects**
   Help elected officials, city planners, neighborhood planning councils better understand how these housing options fit into neighborhoods by creating a tour to show good and bad examples

- **On the Counter Design Review**
  Create an easy design review checklist and process. This could be combined with catalogue and planning book off the shelf designs.

- **Create Benchmarks for success**
  Look to other cities to see how they are successfully incorporating these housing options into their communities.